

THE PARIS CONSERVATORY.
TESTING THE ASPIRANTS TO THEATRICAL AND MUSICAL FAME.

Paris, July 24.

Each monde, as they say here, has its "field-day." The turf world rejoices in the Grand Prix Sunday, the world of art in the vernissage or private view of the Salons on May Day, which is also becoming the date on which the labor world reviews its forces. The present week is devoted to the Conservatory tests of skill in the histrio-nomic and musical arts. It is the week of the grandes concours or competitions for prizes at that famous academy. Nothing can be more wearisome than to listen to twenty young pianists playing the same piece on the piano; or violinists or violoncellists doing likewise on the instruments to which they devote themselves, or bass, or tenor, or contralto, or mezzo-soprano, or light and high soprano vocalizing, one by one, selections from operatic scores. The competitions for prizes in comedy and tragedy are not less tedious. One is locked up for hours in the box to which one is admitted. Were it possible to go in and out at pleasure the young postulants for artistic fame who submit to tests up to the little stage of the Conservatory might be rendered nervous or the jury disturbed. The heat is as that of an oven, and not a sound is to be heard, save on the stage, or what may be given out by the nostrils of a slumbering person. The jurors pass most of their time asleep. Auber always slept through the competitive singing. He took stock before the public trials of skill of the capacities of those who were to vocalize before him. Ambroise Thomas is more attentive, being on the lookout for an ideal Ophelia, who might be able to revive the voice which his opera of "Hamlet" had when Christine Nilsson used to appear in it.

In spite of this dullness the public are deeply interested in the examinations at the Conservatory. French people like novelty, and who knows but that some great star may there arise suddenly and gloriously. Then there are the relatives and friends of the debutantes and of their respective professors. Whenever there is a pupil of high promise, his or her professor contrives to let the theatrical and musical critics of the Paris press know all about it.

It is interesting also to see the first start of persons who have doomed themselves for life to the stage. There are few examples of an actor or actress, unless forced to do so, quitting the theatrical profession, even when they did not win any of its great or middling prizes. The passion for the stage is a devouring one. It is in some cases in the nature of a sacrifice, but it is in nearly every case a devouring one. I can only think of two women who had name and fame who disliked the stage and felt disgruntled at their theatrical triumph. One was Fanny Kemble and the other was Jenny Lind. Occasionally one hears of a French actor getting disgusted at not "setting fire to the Seine" and going into business. A great confectioner, who won renown as such under the Second Empire, had trod the boards of the Conservatory and different Boulevard theatres before he began to sell sweetmeats. I was recently told of a young actor who was angry at not being admitted to the Franche-Comté and is going to set up as a dressmaker. Mlle. Croizette retired while still beautiful, but it was to enjoy the vast fortune that M. Stern secured to her in making her wife.

The career of dramatic authors is not less absorbing. Sardou once told me that each time a play of his comes out well he experiences all the joy of a father who has received a visit from a loved child who went into a far country to make a fortune and returned successful. Labiche could never give up writing comedies for the Palais Royal Theatre, nor resist the temptation when in broken health, and not in a state to bear up against the bad ventilation of a Paris playhouse, of going to see them performed. I have known a good many old actors and actresses and have found the passion for the stage clinging to them in their chair days. Samson who taught Rachel, had a little theatre in his country-house, where he and his children and his grandchildren used often to play. Pierre Bermon was a grandchild, and acquired that perfect diction for which he is remarkable under Samson's home tuition.

Life at the Conservatory is more exciting than agreeably lively. The competitive principle presses hard upon all the pupils, and squeezes out amiability of character. The young are shortsighted and have small faith in doing the right thing and not troubling about success. It requires wide experience of life and a fine mind to have firm belief in the straight and narrow path, and in the splendid rewards to which it leads. The pupils in the different classes are nearly always poor. The relatives who support them are always impatient of immediate brilliant results. When prizes are not obtained money allowances are withdrawn and a plunge into utter poverty ensues. The pupils are compelled to work, and to teach their talents to boast of edge their way into some theatre when they leave the Conservatory. Each examination casts scores of pupils into the purgatory of despair. The winners of first prizes quit the school triumphant, but the others are doomed to vegetate, perhaps, for years and often for life. The one consolation is that the jury was unfair to them, they themselves were unskilled in the art of intrigue.

The actors and actresses who fetch the most crowded houses are not always ex-pupils of the Conservatory. Those within the last ten years who obtained first prizes for tragedy, for comedy have had a most brilliant career of extraction of their professors. Some who were regarded as future stars are toiling away in provincial theatres. Tarride, who graduated with a prize for tragedy, has gone into low comedy and is doing well.

E. C.

LITERARY NOTES.

Mr. Thomas Bailey Aldrich has written a number of short stories for "The Century," all of which will appear during the coming year. The next number of the magazine will contain a portrait of the author.

In October Thomas Whitaker will issue "The Church of England in Nova Scotia, and the Tory Clergy of the Revolution," by the Rev. Arthur Worthen Eaton. Mr. Eaton is a Nova Scotian by birth, and for many years has made a special study of the history and legends of that interesting country. His coming volume treats of the remarkable emigration from the American colonies to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick of between 30,000 and 40,000 loyalists, mainly members of the Church of England. Not only was this emigration an important event in itself, but it has never before been adequately treated in any history, a fact that greatly adds to the interest of Mr. Eaton's work. The history of the English Church in Nova Scotia will be given, and the lives of some of the most prominent loyalist clergymen will be sketched.

In the recently published biography of Sir John Franklin appear some fresh letters written by Captain Fitz-James and pleasantly illustrative of Franklin's character. "I like a man who is in earnest," says Fitz-James. "Sir John Franklin read the Church service to day and a sermon so very beautifully that I defy any man not to feel the force of what he would convey." Again: "Sir John is delightful, active and energetic, and evidently, even now, persevering. What he has been we all know. I think if it will turn out that he is in no ways altered. He is full of conversation and interesting anecdotes of his former voyages. I would not lose him for the command of the expedition, for I have a real regard, if I might say affection, for him, and believe this is felt by all of us."

Ignatius Donnelly's new novel is nearly ready for publication. It is gravely stated, that his lurid story, "Caesar's Column," has gone into its twenty-sixth edition—which is not saying much for the taste of American readers. "Dr. Ifugue" is the title of the forthcoming book.

Italians manifest great interest in the "Literary Congress" to be held this autumn in Milan under the presidency of the Marquis Giovanni Visconti-Venosta. Invitations to the congress have been sent out by the "Societe des Auteurs." The object is to consider the rights of authors in Italy and to bring about the enactment of protective laws for their works.

M. Erckmann and the heirs of the book firm Berthold, in Milan, the defendants, according to the complaint, secured the right of producing the drama "Die Ruyblot" in Italy. They recently sold the play to Massagno and Longo, to be used as a libretto for the new opera bearing the same name. Considerable interest is taken in the outcome of the suit.

New Publications

BOOK.—French Conversations, Idioms, 25c. (stamp). Prof. ELMER YOUNGMAN, 533 Broadway, New York City. Price, \$1.00. French conversation lessons: no payment in advance. Every lesson paid for.

THE HUMAN HAIR: WHY FALSE OFF? By Prof. HARLEY F. TURNER, 187, Great Jones Street, New York. Price, \$1.00. Every one should read this little book.—Atheneum.

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